



DEBATE

# Breathing Easy?

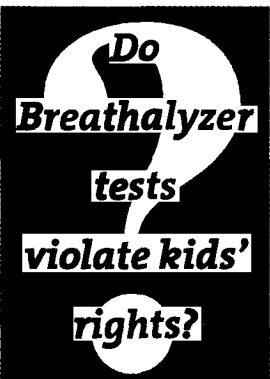
Students at Pequannock Township High School in New Jersey are going to have to take a deep breath ... and let it out into a Breathalyzer. That's the new rule if they want to attend school dances this year. The school board recently approved a new policy that lets school officials test students for alcohol use, whether the officials have reason to suspect the students of wrongdoing or not. Students will have to take Breathalyzer tests, which measure the amount of alcohol a person has consumed by analyzing chemicals in the breath.

Pequannock Township High is the latest school to institute a Breathalyzer-test policy for school events, such as dances and field trips. Across the country, students are being asked—in some cases, required—to prove they haven't been drinking alcohol if they want to get in.

Educators and health officials say the tests strengthen zero-tolerance policies on drug and alcohol use.

Others say the tests violate students' civil rights. The Fourth Amendment

to the U.S. Constitution protects citizens from unreasonable searches and seizures. It requires police to have probable cause to search private property and to obtain a warrant from a judge to conduct one. In 2002, however, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the right of schools to randomly test students involved in competitive activities for drugs and alcohol. Whether that extends to all student functions remains up for debate.



## KEEP KIDS SAFE

Breathalyzer tests are a good way for schools to ensure that students are safe during school activities, says David Evans, executive director of the Drug-Free Schools Coalition, a national organization based in New Jersey. "The schools have a responsibility to protect children when they are at school, and the schools have an educational mission, and [alcohol use] disrupts that," Evans told *Current Events*. Evans says that the Supreme Court has upheld schools' rights to test students in past cases.

Michael Hughes, principal of

North Hunterdon (N.J.) High School, says that Breathalyzers give kids another reason to say no to alcohol. "The Breathalyzer is a good tool because it's a deterrent," Hughes told *The (Newark, N.J.) Star-Ledger*. "It gives the kid a [reason] to say, 'Hey, I'm not going to take a chance to ruin my prom, embarrass myself.'" Evans also stresses that the tests teach kids "you don't have to drink to have a good time."

## KIDS AREN'T CRIMINALS

Requiring students to take Breathalyzer tests violates their constitutional rights, some experts say. "It treats everybody as if they're guilty and forces them to prove their innocence, which is exactly what the Fourth Amendment ban on unreasonable searches was trying to prevent," David Fidanque, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Oregon office, told *The Register-Guard* of Eugene, Ore.

Adam Talbot, a senior at Rockville (Conn.) High School, agrees. He unexpectedly had to submit to a test at his junior prom. "I believe it was an unnecessary hassle. It was just kind of a weird feeling to have to stand there and [take a Breathalyzer test] to gain entrance to the dance. You felt criminal," Adam told *Current Events*. He has decided to skip his senior prom, in part, to protest the test.

Others worry that Breathalyzers will keep kids away from school activities but not from the danger of drinking. Cindy Carlson, a parent who helped organize an after-prom party for Steamboat Springs High School in Colorado, shared her concerns with *The Denver Post*. "I don't want [students] to be deterred if they think they are going to be tested at the door. Then what are they going to do the rest of the night?" CE

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do Breathalyzer tests violate rights? Let us know at [cenewsblog.com](http://cenewsblog.com).